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HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Fifty-first session

REPORT OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE (29 February - 2 March 2000)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was opened by the Chairman of the Executive Committee, His Excellency, Ambassador Raimundo Pérez-Hernández y Torra (Spain), who took the opportunity to welcome the delegations of Chile, Côte d'Ivoire and the Republic of Korea as newly elected members of the Executive Committee. The Chairman informed the Committee that delegations of Albania, Burundi, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Zambia had requested to participate in meetings of the Standing Committee during 2000 as Observers in addition to those announced at the Executive Committee's last session, and suggested that their participation begin immediately, in line with the Executive Committee's decision on Observer participation taken in 1999 (A/AC.96/928). Delegations agreed to this proposal. The Chairman also welcomed non-governmental organization (NGO) delegations attending the Standing Committee for a third year as observers, as a result of the decision by the Executive Committee in 1998 (EC/49/SC/CRP.2). His Excellency, Ambassador Ali Khorram, Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee chaired agenda items 4 to 6(i).

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING AND THE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE IN 2000

2. The agenda (EC/50/SC/CRP.1) and the work programme of the Standing Committee in 2000 (EC/50/SC/CRP.2) were adopted without revision.

III. DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER'S STATEMENT

3. The Deputy High Commissioner delivered an opening statement to the Standing Committee, highlighting refugee situations around the world and providing delegations with an update on policy developments within UNHCR. He also reflected on his impressions of UNHCR after having completed six months with the Office.

IV. PROGRAMME AND FUNDING

A. Overall programme and funding in 1999 and projections for 2000

4. The Assistant High Commissioner briefed the delegations on the preliminary results of the recent internal prioritisation exercise in relation to UNHCR's operations for the year 2000. One purpose of the exercise was to take early action towards bridging the gap between the approved budget and the anticipated shortfall in funding. He defined the criteria being used as the basis, and announced that a further meeting was scheduled for the end of March 2000, when working budgets would be adjusted in the light of global priorities. The consequences of certain activities not being funded would be shared with delegations later.

5. The Director of the Division of Operational Support presented information on overall programme and funding in 1999 and projects for 2000, as contained in document EC/50/SC/CRP.3. She drew attention to the fact that the 1999 carry-over shown in the table on estimated-requirements in 1999 (Annex I of the document) was now assessed at $86 million.

6. In a short introductory statement on UNHCR's funding strategy, the Director of the Division of Communication and Information briefed the Standing Committee on work undertaken to build new constituencies and increase the scope of public awareness and voluntary funding. A recent appraisal of private sector fund-raising pointed to a significant potential both with the general public and with corporations and foundations. Encouraging links had already been established with several new donors in the private and corporate sector and these would be further developed by UNHCR's newly-established Private Sector and Public Affairs section. The months to come would also see the establishment and strengthening of national associations as part of the overall effort to strengthen ties with civil society.

7. The Head of the Donor Relations and Resource Mobilization Service then briefly reviewed the total income received in 1999, amounting to $1.104 billion. A substantial share had been for the extraordinary needs of three successive emergencies (Kosovo, East Timor and Chechnya). He was pleased to report, however, that UNHCR's regular activities had not suffered seriously as a result of the emergencies, although less visible situations continue to be plagued by systematic shortfalls. He also drew attention to the fact that the percentage of unearmarked contributions (on which many of these situations depended) had continued to decrease, while the carry-over of funds at the end of the year was also much lower than in previous years. Responding to these worrying trends, UNHCR was effecting an ever-increasing control on expenditure and closely monitoring the implementation rates of partners.

8. Funding requirements for 2000, as presented in the Global Appeal, amounted to $965 million, of which $945 million were being sought in voluntary contributions. The newly introduced unified budget, combining General and Special Programmes brought greater transparency, but also resulted in fierce competition for unearmarked funds, requiring greater flexibility from donors. In response, some pledges had been made or promised earlier, while donors were also adapting their conditions to the new budget, and discussing their pledging mechanisms before finalizing their

contributions. While welcoming these positive developments, the Head of the Donor Relations and Resource Mobilization Service concluded by appealing for the committed support of donors towards full and early funding. Without this, it would be impossible to meet the requirements of the budget, as approved by the Executive Committee for the year 2000.

9. In response to these presentations, some delegations expressed concern over the projected shortfall for 2000, and acknowledged the need to ensure that the approved budget is fully funded. Support was again expressed for the newly introduced unified budget. Several delegations pointed out that early contributions as well as a degree of flexibility were essential for the new budget to work, and announced that their contributions would be paid soon and with limited earmarking.

10. One delegation expressed concern that less visible programmes could be under-financed, while another delegation mentioned that NGO partners perceived the prioritization exercise as leading to cuts in budgets for Africa in the course of 2000. The Assistant High Commissioner reassured the delegation that no reduction in the Africa budget was foreseen. In response to a question about the carry-over into the year 2000, it was explained that the adjustment reflected final figures at the recent closure of the 1999 accounts. A breakdown of the carry-over was given.

11. On the question of funding mechanisms, one delegation welcomed the prospect of ongoing informal consultations on budgetary matters. Another delegation recalled that, as discussed previously, there was a need to propose an alternative to the annual Pledging Conference in New York, which had outlived its usefulness.

12. Several delegations suggested amending the second operative paragraph of the draft decision contained in Annex VII of document EC/50/SC/CRP.3, to read "early availability of contributions is essential". With this amendment, the draft decision was adopted (cf. Annex I.A).

B. Africa

13. In a brief opening presentation, the Director of the Bureau for Africa first expressed sympathy for the plight of the people of Mozambique. He then described some of the major political and security developments in sub-Saharan Africa and their impact on UNHCR's work in the second half of 1999 as well as significant features of current activities region by region. In this context, he gave details of the repatriation movements involving Liberian, Sierra Leonean, Chadian, Eritrean and Somali refugees. He also referred to problems currently being encountered in a number of countries, notably the Democratic Republic of the Congo, United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi and Angola . In conclusion he outlined policies and strategies for the coming two years with respect to protection and programme activities, and increased partnerships.

14. In the course of the debate, in which numerous statements were made, broad support was expressed for UNHCR's activities in Africa, and for the policy framework presented by the Bureau Director. Several delegations expressed appreciation for the spotlight placed on African affairs by the Security Council by dedicating its January 2000 session to Africa. The

recent Security Council resolution reinforcing the peacekeeping operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was also welcomed.

15. Grave concern was voiced, nevertheless, by many delegations over continued double standards in the level of assistance provided to refugees in Africa as compared to that provided in other refugee situations. One delegation deplored in particular the lack of adequate staffing in several refugee hosting countries, as well as inadequate food supplies. Another delegation raised the question of the erosion of asylum principles in Africa, while an observer delegation, speaking on behalf of the NGOs, drew attention to the issue of access to refugee and displaced populations.

16. Recalling the annual theme of the Executive Committee's fiftieth session, several delegations insisted on the importance of partnerships, notably with the Organization for African Unity, and with other regional and sub-regional organizations. Also in this context, further cooperation with UNDP, the World Bank and other development agencies was encouraged. The Brookings Process was cited as an interesting and promising example of such cooperation. One delegation also referred to hopes that were pinned on the proposed Stability Pact for West Africa as a means of achieving sustainable growth in a region that had been wrought with conflict. Another delegation drew attention to the vital importance of injecting humanitarian concerns in peace settlements, recalling that this issue had been included in the resolution on refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa adopted by the General Assembly at its recent session.

17. Several questions were raised concerning UNHCR's involvement with internally displaced persons, with some delegations encouraging a more active role for the organization and others sounding a note of caution. In response, the Assistant High Commissioner explained that UNHCR was currently examining and clarifying its position and that further discussions were planned to take place shortly. He observed, however, that it was not realistic to expect a single organization to be able to take up such a responsibility, and that close coordination with ICRC, NGOs and others was essential, not forgetting the responsibility of national authorities.

18. In his concluding remarks to the Standing Committee, the Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa provided details of several operations in which delegations had shown a particular interest, many of them involving voluntary repatriation. He also specified that, following lengthy discussions with all parties concerned, there was now an agreement in principle on the relevance of the cessation clause to the situation of pre-1991 Ethiopian refugees. However, discussions were ongoing concerning arrangements for its application, which would require a degree of flexibility. He confirmed that more regular briefings would be organized in future on various aspects of UNHCR's operations in Africa, in response to the requests of several delegations. Finally, he called for increased support by donors to supplement UNHCR's meagre resources in Africa, where inadequate staffing and funding were having an adverse effect on both assistance and protection programmes. On the announcement of his retirement Delegations expressed appreciation to the Director of the Africa Bureau for his many years of dedicated service to UNHCR.

C. CASWANAME

19. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Central Asia, Southwest Asia, North Africa and the Middle East (CASWANAME) provided a detailed overview of the region in his strategic oral presentation. The Director emphasized the complexity of the region and the difficulty the international community has in finding solutions to its long-standing refugee situations. He highlighted the efforts being made on behalf of refugee women, refugee children and in developing effective working relationships with national NGOs. He then reviewed the progress made in achieving various goals and objectives in each sub-region during the past year. In concluding, the Director outlined the continuing challenges faced in the region and the Bureau's key operational strategies for meeting them in 2000 and 2001.

20. The Chairman followed with a statement reporting on his recent trip to the Islamic Republic of Iran where he had gone to observe and assess the Afghan refugee situation in the country. In his report, the Chairman reviewed the main features of the Afghan refugee situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the problems and difficulties currently faced and concluded with recommendations for further consideration and follow-up.

21. In their interventions, delegations expressed appreciation for the comprehensiveness of the information provided by the Regional Director and the Chairman. While overall support was expressed for the efforts being made by UNHCR and its partners in the region, concern was voiced over the lack of progress in resolving protracted refugee situations, particularly in South-West Asia and Western Sahara. UNHCR was requested to increase its efforts in implementing durable solutions while also ensuring adequate protection and appropriate assistance for these refugee groups. Several delegations indicated their apprehensions about the adequacy of UNHCR's field presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, the involvement of refugees from the region in illegal trafficking in drugs, arms and people, the level of funding for resettlement, the number of protection staff in the region and continuing reductions in UNHCR assistance budgets. Further information was requested on how the Joint Programme for Voluntary Repatriation from the Islamic Republic of Iran would be implemented. Support was also voiced for UNHCR's efforts to increase the involvement of NGOs in its activities and the emphasis on refugee women and children in the region.

22. In responding to delegations, the Director focused on providing further information on the Joint Programme for Voluntary Repatriation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, reiterated UNHCR's commitment to the implementation of the United Nations Settlement Plan for Western Sahara and explained in greater detail activities undertaken by UNHCR inside Afghanistan and Iraq for the benefit of returnees and refugees.

D. Medium Term Plan 2002-2005

23. This agenda item was introduced by the Director of the Division of Operational Support. She explained the relationship of the document before the Standing Committee (EC/50/SC/CRP.4) to the wider United Nations budgetary process.

24. In their interventions, delegations suggested a number of changes and additions. It was felt that some reference to the links between refugee issues and human rights should be added. Other issues to be added or highlighted included that of the security of staff and other humanitarian workers; UNHCR's relations with the military in the delivery of humanitarian assistance; the importance of enhancing UNHCR's emergency response capacity, as well as linkages with other agencies, and the broader challenge of coordinating actors working in the "humanitarian space". The need for UNHCR to address the disparities in the level of assistance provided in different operations around the world was also underlined. One delegation questioned the rather artificial division of the programme into the two subprogrammes of international protection and humanitarian assistance. Greater attention also needed to be given to the programme priorities of refugee women, children/adolescents, the elderly and the environment. The importance of children's education and training was stressed by one delegation. The need for training in the context of capacity-building was also raised. One delegation asked that the list of documents listed under the section entitled "Legislative Mandates" be reviewed to ensure that only documents emanating from inter-governmental bodies be included. Another delegation questioned whether returns must necessarily be voluntary. Some delegations felt that the document should be more results-oriented. In addition, several delegations asked that the draft decision be amended in its operative paragraph 3 to include "policies".

25. On the understanding that the above recommendations would be reflected in the text to be sent to the United Nations Secretariat, the draft decision was adopted as amended (cf. Annex I.B).

E. Structure of the Annual Programme Budget document

26. This item and the related paper (EC/50/SC/CRP.5) was introduced by the Director of the Division of Operational Support. The meeting also had before it a draft decision (EC/50/SC/CRP.5/Add.1). The Director referred to the extensive work undertaken by the Standing Committee in informal consultations on this issue

27. Delegations in their interventions noted that the task of finding a balance between the information they required to approve a budget and the specific needs of the ACABQ would be challenging; the exercise of arriving at the most acceptable programme budget document was an ongoing task. It was important, however, that detailed information on all programmes (objectives, activities, indicators), even if not included in the budget document which would limit itself to major country programmes, be available to delegations on the UNHCR external website. The draft decision was adopted by delegations (cf. Annex I.C).

V. PROTECTION/PROGRAMME POLICY

28. In assuming the Chairmanship of the meeting, the Vice-Chairman provided delegations with a brief report on his mission to Thailand. He shared his impressions of the situation of Myanmar refugees housed on the Thai/Myanmar border and referred to his discussions in Bangkok with senior government officials. Commenting on his initial conclusions from the mission, he encouraged the international community to take robust steps to advance durable solutions for the situation of Myanmar refugees in Thailand. A full

report on his mission and subsequent initiatives taken to follow up his recommendations will be made available during the eighteenth meeting of the Standing Committee in July 2000.

A. Follow-up to Annual Theme of fiftieth session

29. Introducing this sub-item, the Chairman drew attention to the documentation presented to the fiftieth session of the Executive Committee as background to the annual theme (*Strengthening partnership to ensure protection, also in relation to security* (A/AC.96/923)) and to the Chairman's summary of the debate (A/AC.96/928 Annex III). He suggested that the outstanding questions listed at the end of the Chairman's summary could give focus to delegations' comments on the follow-up.

30. In their interventions, delegations felt it was important to integrate issues arising from the debate into the work of the Standing Committee, with a particular focus on how to operationalize them. Some delegations considered that the questions raised by the Chairman were useful starting points for this, but that they needed to be prioritized, with guidance from UNHCR. It was suggested that such an exercise could lead to informal consultations with delegations and the formulation of conclusions for adoption by the Executive Committee. The inclusion of the issue of partnerships in the strategic presentation on Africa was welcomed and this approach was encouraged for future regional presentations. Several delegations made reference to country-specific initiatives since the debate in the plenary.

31. In responding, the Secretary of the Executive Committee informed delegations that UNHCR had undertaken an internal review of the issues arising from the plenary debate. Given the wide-ranging issues raised, these were being analyzed at the level of the Regional Bureaux, and the ideas filtered into regional policies and strategies. In addition, many of the essential elements of the debate were reflected in the General Assembly's "omnibus" resolution on UNHCR, as well as in other General Assembly resolutions on issues of concern to UNHCR. She described this process as the creation of soft law which derived directly from the plenary debate.

B. Refugee Children and Adolescents

32. The Director of the Division of Operational Support (DOS) introduced the document EC/50/SC/CRP.7 entitled, *Refugee Children and Adolescents: a Progress Report*.

33. In the debate that followed, many delegations expressed their interest in a range of issues, including the need to strengthen the possibility of access by refugee children and adolescents to primary and post-primary education, and to skills training. Some also stressed the need to focus on problems of forced recruitment, domestic violence and gender-based violence. One delegation emphasized the importance of maintaining the humanitarian and civilian character of refugee camps to avoid further recruitment of children and adolescents. While the adoption of the term "separated children" as a broader term than "unaccompanied minors" received wide support, one delegation questioned what the impact of this term would be.

34. Some delegations suggested that refugee children and adolescents be included on the agenda of the next Executive Committee session. One delegation expressed support for a conclusion to be proposed by NGOs on refugee and displaced children and adolescents.

35. The need for close inter-agency cooperation was emphasized, notably with UNICEF and UNESCO. Some delegations also requested more quantitative data on activities in favour of refugee children and adolescents, as well as the development of performance indicators. Support was, moreover, expressed for the planned review and update of existing UNHCR guidelines concerning this group.

36. Several delegations commended the training and capacity-building programme Action for the Rights of Children (ARC), and welcomed the evaluation of the impact of this initiative in the course of 2000. The planned evaluation of the role and impact of the Regional Policy Officers posts (Refugee Children) was likewise supported. One delegation suggested that UNHCR might envisage a separate, briefing meeting with these Officers for the benefit of the Executive Committee at its next session. While UNHCR's efforts to promote mainstreaming of refugee children and adolescents into general UNHCR programming was welcomed, some delegations stressed the importance of maintaining specialised staff to work on refugee children's issues and to provide sufficient resources.

37. Responding to questions and concerns raised, the Senior Coordinator expressed appreciation for the interest shown by delegations in UNHCR's work for children and adolescents of concern to the Office, emphasizing that her role supported by the Regional Policy Officers was principally one of advocate. The Committee's continued support was an essential element in the effectively fulfilment of this role.

C. Older Refugees

38. Introducing this sub-item, the Director of the Division of Operational Support made reference to activities undertaken within the context of the International Year of Older Persons, drawing particular attention to the formulation of a policy on older refugees, as contained in document EC/50/SC/CRP.8.

39. While welcoming these efforts, it was pointed out by some delegations that the policy as proposed gave inadequate attention to the specific needs of older refugee women, which varied substantially from those of older refugee men. Amendments to strengthen the gender-sensitivity of the policy were proposed. One delegation also recommended the development of indicators for the purpose of monitoring the implementation of the policy.

40. In a statement on behalf of NGOs, emphasis was placed on the particular hardship suffered by older refugees as one of the most neglected refugee populations. In flight, health and mobility problems placed them at a further disadvantage, while reintegration programmes rarely addressed the unique concerns and needs of the elderly. Poverty and exclusion remained the greatest threats, particularly with the breakdown of traditional support structures. Yet their leadership skills and life experience made them a valuable asset to the community that should be used when designing and delivering programmes. These views were echoed by several delegations.

41. Some delegations raised the issue of UNHCR's capacity to meet the needs of older refugees and of other vulnerable groups, expressing their concern that the presence of Community Services Officers world-wide had decreased, even though they were well represented in the operations in Timor and Kosovo.
42. In conclusion of the discussion, the draft conclusion and policy were adopted, as amended (cf. Annexes I.D and II).

D. Mainstreaming Environmental Concerns in Refugee Operations

43. The Director of the Division of Operational Support introduced the sub-item and related conference room paper, *Mainstreaming Environmental Concerns in Refugee Operations* (EC/50/SC/CRP.9). She paid tribute to the three previous Senior Coordinators for the Environment seconded by the Government of Japan, and thanked those who had funded aspects of UNHCR's environmental activities. The Director pointed out that the functions of the Senior Coordinator had now been assumed by the Chief of the recently established Engineering and Environmental Services Section (EESS). She explained that the strategy of the new section has to focus on the mainstreaming of environmental concerns in the programming process and at all stages of a refugee operation. This would be accomplished through monitoring, with special attention being paid to compliance with policy and guidelines developed by UNHCR.

44. Delegations expressed general satisfaction with the priority given by UNHCR to environmental issues, and with the progress achieved so far in mainstreaming environmental activities, and in developing environmental policies and guidelines. The Office was encouraged to maintain these useful activities and to develop indicators on the implementation of the guidelines. Particular interest was shown in UNHCR's cooperation with donors and other relevant agencies, in particular the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP). Some delegations felt that environmental issues could be better addressed in consolidated appeals. Delegations requested that more detailed information on projects be made available by UNHCR, and that progress in mainstreaming environmental concerns and their impact be better evaluated. Two delegations whose countries had suffered environmental degradation as a result of the presence of refugees called on UNHCR for support in redressing the resulting adverse environmental impact. The Chief of EESS responded to the various interventions and assured delegations that UNHCR would maintain its level of activities in this field. The draft conclusion on mainstreaming environmental concerns in refugee operations was amended notably to emphasize the importance of partnership and cooperation with other relevant actors. It was adopted as amended (Annex I.E).

E. Statistics and Registration

45. The Director of the Division of Operational Support presented *Statistics and Registration: A Progress Report*, contained in EC/50/SC/CRP.10.

46. Several delegations expressed appreciation for the information as contained in the conference room paper, as well as for other statistical reports and analyses prepared during 1999. Particular interest was shown in the statistical findings on gender, children and the elderly. The new activities presented in the progress report were also welcomed.

47. Recognizing the absence of appropriate refugee data from industrialized countries, one delegation suggested that this information might be gathered from statistics made available by other international organizations. Another delegation requested that national practices in recording asylum-seeker and refugees be further documented. Delegations stated that further progress could be achieved in the area of registration and asked UNHCR to describe the steps that were being taken to improve UNHCR's registration capacity. In this regard, reference was made to recommendations contained in the independent evaluation of UNHCR's response to the Kosovo refugee crisis.

48. In responding, the Senior Statistician recognized the importance of further documenting the differences in national practices in compiling statistics. He also highlighted the high level of interagency cooperation and information-sharing on data collection. It was stressed, however, that UNHCR attached great importance to compiling statistics on refugees and others of concern to the Office. In addition, delegations were informed that progress in the area of registration was expected in the context of project PROFILE. A feasibility study on this project was about to be launched. At the same time, UNHCR's registration capacity would be strengthened.

F. Reintegration

49. The Deputy High Commissioner introduced this sub-item, drawing attention to the conference room paper entitled *Reintegration: a Progress Report* (EC/50/SC/CRP.11). He highlighted the urgency UNHCR was placing on addressing the gap between immediate reintegration assistance and longer-term development efforts, and its desire for practical and tangible results. Support for local capacities was suggested as one means of achieving this.

50. A number of delegations expressed satisfaction with the increased interest and actions being directed towards bridging the gap between relief and development in Africa, especially within the context of the follow-up to the Brookings Roundtables. While recognizing the extent of the challenge, one delegation commended the international community as a whole, by attributing the progress achieved over the past year to the commitment and consistent work of all organizations to strengthen traditional partnerships and to forge those that are new. Another delegation pointed out that the most important aspect of the current discussion on the "gap" is the emphasis on reviewing coordination tools, since commonly-agreed operational responses are critical to addressing cross-border issues. Several delegations called for the reinvigoration of existing structures and arrangements, and the inclusion of other actors, such as the private sector, without creating new bureaucratic layers.

51. The UNDP participant drew attention to other fora where the issue of reintegration was being discussed, namely the OECD/DAC Task Force on Peace, Conflict and Development and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Reference Group. Major concerns identified in a report by the IASC Working Group were highlighted. These included the need for the international community to have a community-based response; the importance of not exacerbating funding gaps; the priority that should be given to proactive approaches to conflict prevention; and the need for more flexibility, adaptability and coordination on the part of the United Nations. A number of delegations gave specific examples of how assistance from the international community was essential to sustainable peace, and one delegation also drew

attention to the importance of supporting reintegration following displacement resulting from natural disasters.

52. In the course of the debate, one delegation expressed the hope that UNHCR's *Operational Framework for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities in Post-Conflict Situations* would be issued rapidly and shared with other agencies, in order that its contents could be translated into action.

VI. COORDINATION

53. In her regular oral update, the Head of the Secretariat and Inter-Organization Service briefly reviewed main developments since the sixteenth meeting of the Standing Committee in September 1999. Priority issues on the agenda of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) had included an urgent focus on security following the killing of aid workers in Burundi in late 1999, the functioning of the Resident Coordinators system and the review of its own mechanism. Recent meetings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and of its working groups had concerned subjects such as the protection of internally displaced persons, post-conflict reintegration, and the Consolidated Appeals process (CAP). Several IASC sub-working or reference groups had been discontinued having completed their work, while new task forces had been established on security and HIV/AIDS. She also gave information on arrangements for the humanitarian segment of ECOSOC's forthcoming substantive session. She concluded with a reference to more specific coordinating initiatives at a bilateral level, involving World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

54. Commenting on these various developments, several delegations noted their interest in the discussions underway on the question of internally displaced persons. They pointed to the need for a careful review of this issue by the relevant coordinating bodies, emphasizing the value of a collaborative approach. Referring to the CAP, one delegation observed that, while some improvements had been achieved, more could be done to ensure that the process served effectively as a tool not only for resource mobilization, but in planning for emergency response at field level.

VII. STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE UNHCR STAFF COUNCIL

55. In the course of the meeting, the Committee was provided with an update on the activities of UNHCR's Staff Council. In delivering his statement, the Chairman of the Staff Council highlighted issues related to the newly instituted promotions and posting regulations, the safety and living conditions of staff in the field and the need for sufficient resources to enable the Staff Council to be effective. One delegation expressed appreciation for the presentation and the Chairman of the Staff Council was encouraged to continue to inform the Standing Committee of its activities.

VIII. GOVERNANCE

A. Selection of Annual Theme for fifty-first session

56. The Chairman opened discussions on the annual theme for the fifty-first session of the Executive Committee, recalling the decision by the Standing Committee in 1996 whereby the selection of the annual theme would take place in two stages. In their preliminary consideration of the annual theme,

delegations suggested that its focus should give recognition to UNHCR's 50th anniversary and encourage reflection, as well as be orientated towards solutions and support to hosting States, and future action. Several propsals were put forward for the title of the theme and the need for a succinct, clear title which is forward looking and based on historical analysis was emphasized. Delegations were reminded that final consideration of the annual theme will take place during the eighteenth meeting of the Standing Committee in July 2000. In the meantime, the Vice-Chairman undertook to consult with delegations and the High Commissioner on the title of the theme.

B. Revitalization of Executive Committee's format

57. In reassuming the Chairmanship of the meeting, the Chairman of the Executive Committee drew attention to the contents of document EC/50/SC/CRP.6, proposing enhancements to the format of the Executive Committee's fifty-first session, of which the general purpose was to ensure more interactive and productive discussions. He recalled that the new arrangements and draft programme were the result of consultations that had taken place over the past months, in which members had participated actively and which had also benefited from input from the High Commissioner. The new features mainly concerned arrangements for the annual theme debate, the introduction of a panel session and increased opportunities for briefings on specific field operations.

58. One delegation proposed exploring ways of strengthening the link between the pre-Executive Committee meeting of NGOs and the session itself, in order to give more prominence to NGO concerns. This was supported by an observer speaking on behalf of NGOs, who also welcomed the possibility of participating in the panel discussion.

59. While welcoming the new arrangements notably those that concerned the annual theme debate, doubts were expressed by some delegations as to the feasibility of sharing outlines of their statements ahead of time. One delegation advised that exceptions to the five minute rule on statements should be defined more clearly. Another delegation also warned that the number of panellists should not be too high.

C. UNHCR's 50th anniversary

60. UNHCR's Senior Coordinator for the 50th anniversary presented delegations with an update on planned activities to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Office. He pointed out that the focus of activities would be to change perceptions of refugees and break the often negative stereotyping of them, and to launch a Refugee Education Trust as a lasting outcome of the event. The actual anniversary falls on 14 December, and the Senior Coordinator described a number of initiatives that are being planned around this date, including the launching of a special 50th anniversary edition of *The State of the World's Refugees*; a website displaying a gallery of prominent refugees; a public awareness campaign entitled "respect for refugees" and several exhibitions; commemorative stamps; and a photo book of refugee children.

IX. THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF UNHCR'S RESPONSE TO THE KOSOVO EMERGENCY

61. At the invitation of the Chair, the leader of the evaluation team, Dr. Astri Suhrke, opened the discussion by briefly discussing the process that had been followed in preparing the report, and summarizing its findings. In short, the report's main conclusion was that UNHCR had made a relatively weak performance in a very difficult situation. It had not utilized its existing emergency preparedness and response capacity as well as it could have done, and had shown a lack of professionalism in terms of management, staffing, training, and systems. The crisis had, however, been characterized by pronounced bilateralism, causing severe problems of coordination and differing standards of assistance, and undermining any multilateral capacity. NATO's role had resulted in blurring the distinction between military and humanitarian action. Even though their role had been more positive than negative, it had served to underline the need to strengthen the civilian response.

62. The recommendations of the evaluation report ranged from those with broad policy implications to specific operational proposals. On assistance, the report concluded that UNHCR should not seek to develop an in-house capacity to deal with massive emergencies, but should rather strengthen its capacity for strategic planning and coordination of external resources. On protection, it found that burden-sharing had proved essential, and should be promoted in cases of mass influx into small and vulnerable States as had happened in the Kosovo crisis. On coordination, there was a need to strengthen the existing framework involving States and NGOs. In a massive emergency demanding a coordinating capacity exceeding that of UNHCR, more use should be made of OCHA.

63. Summarizing UNHCR's response to the evaluation report as contained in document EC/50/SC/CRP.12, the Assistant High Commissioner confirmed that UNHCR agreed with many of the findings regarding its performance, especially with respect to weaknesses in its management structures, contingency planning and response in getting enough people with the right experience on the ground in time. These factors had had a negative impact on UNHCR's capacity to coordinate. On a more positive note, UNHCR welcomed the evaluation's recognition of UNHCR's improved performance in terms of protection. He also noted that the report covered a relatively limited period, from March until June 1999, and that UNHCR had taken steps to improve its performance since that time. It had also conducted an internal review of emergency preparedness which had identified three priorities for immediate reinforcement: improving field-level management capacity; enhancing emergency management at Headquarters; and ensuring the ready availability of equipment and relief items for emergency operations. Proposals were contained in an information note provided at the meeting (EC/50/SC/INF.1). In conclusion, he noted that it was up to States to determine how much they were prepared to finance in terms of UNHCR's emergency response capacity.

64. In the ensuing debate, many of the delegations commended the high quality of the evaluation report, found to be well-balanced and a fair reflection of the international community's response. UNHCR was also commended for its courage in initiating such a transparent and unprecedented review of its operations.

65. There were also many expressions of concern over the conclusions reached on UNHCR's weak emergency preparedness and response capacity. One delegation observed that UNHCR should focus on its primary mandate - that of protecting and assisting refugees - rather than broadening its mandate to internally displaced persons. Delegations agreed that there was a limit to the level of preparedness that could be realistically expected. Large crises such as the Kosovo refugee exodus were considered beyond the capacity of any one agency, and required the mounting of a multifaceted relief effort. UNHCR's effort should focus on improving its capacity for strategic planning to mobilize other external resources, and to coordinate them properly. Pointing to the need to address shortcomings in the organization's emergency response capacity in terms of personnel management, deployment and training, some delegations felt that further detailed discussions on this aspect of the evaluation were necessary, including the level of financial commitment required.

66. On the question of coordination, several delegations felt that while UNHCR should clearly take the lead on matters of protection, the coordination of assistance should more properly be dealt with by OCHA. A number of delegations called for a clearer definition of "lead agency" especially in terms of NGO involvement, while the need to clarify the status of OCHA staff seconded to UNHCR was also highlighted. On the issue of protection, several delegations commended UNHCR for its vigorous efforts to defend the principle of first asylum, while one delegation felt that the concept of "humanitarian transfer" should be explored more thoroughly, particularly in cases of small vulnerable states where national security was called into question. Several delegations considered that UNHCR had performed poorly in the registration process, a critical element of the protection response, and that it must improve its capacity in this area.

67. Delegations voiced mixed views on the role of the military in humanitarian operations, with most acknowledging the benefits in terms of provision of assistance in the Kosovo case, while reiterating the need for the role of the military to be subsidiary to that of civilian actors. One delegation expressed concern that the participation in humanitarian action of the military forces of belligerent parties inevitably affected the impartiality and neutrality of such action, and should not occur.

68. A number of delegations also recognized the responsibility of States themselves in the response to the crisis, acknowledging that uncoordinated bilateral action had been a major complicating factor. There was a need to examine the role of States in crises of this kind, and to define more clearly what was expected from UNHCR. One delegation proposed that this could be the subject of more detailed consultations.

69. In statements by two delegations from the region, details of the circumstances that had led to the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme were described. The attention of the international community was also drawn to ongoing tensions in Kosovo and the need for continued assistance both for reconstruction and in assisting refugees remaining in asylum countries.

70. Speaking on behalf of NGOs, ICVA felt that the evaluation process had not sufficiently included NGOs, and that there remained a need for wider reflection on the issues raised in the evaluation with a greater number of stakeholders, including NGOs, NATO, OSCE, etc. This delegation also insisted

on the fundamental obligation of States to respect their first asylum responsibilities. It furthermore challenged the role of the military in humanitarian work.

71. Finally, delegations requested UNHCR to develop an action plan on the follow-up to the recommendations of the evaluation, which should include a timeframe for the review and implementation of the various recommendations.

72. In closing, the Assistant High Commissioner said that UNHCR would be launching a consultative process with States and all relevant actors on next steps in acting on the recommendations both of the evaluation report and UNHCR's own internal review. Discussions for this purpose would be held with the Chairman of the Executive Committee.

X. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

73. There being no further business, the Chairman adjourned the meeting.

DECISIONS AND CONCLUSIONS
(as adopted at the 17th meeting of the Standing Committee,
29 February - 2 March 2000)

A. DECISION ON PROGRAMME AND FUNDING
(Item 3(i))

The Standing Committee,

Recalling the Executive Committee's decision at its Fiftieth Session programme, administrative and financial matters (A/AC.96/928, para. 23);

(a) *Notes* that the UNHCR's overall needs for 2000, based on currently known requirements amounts to $ 965.3 million, comprising $ 933.6 as approved by the Executive Committee (that includes the allocation of $ 20.4 million from the United Nations Regular Budget) and the two Supplementary Programmes totalling $ 31.7 million;

(b) *Stresses* that with the introduction of the unified programme budget for the year 2000, early availability of contributions is essential to allow the continuation and timely implementation of the UNHCR's Programmes, and appeals to donor Governments to make known their contributions as soon as possible.

B. DECISION ON MEDIUM-TERM PLAN
(Item 3(iii))

The Standing Committee,

(a) *Notes* the attached draft of Programme 21: *Protection and Assistance to Refugees* of the United Nations Medium-Term Plan 2002-2005;

(b) *Requests* that any proposals put forward by the Standing Committee on the Medium-Term Plan be reflected in the draft to be submitted by the United Nations Secretariat for further review by the ACABQ, the CPC, ECOSOC and the General Assembly, in the course of 2000;

(c) *Reaffirms* that the Executive Committee will, in accordance with its terms of reference, continue to provide appropriate guidance on UNHCR's policies, programmes and activities;

(d) Further *proposes* that the Executive Committee will, at the appropriate time, review the Plan in order to adjust objectives and priorities in the light of evolving circumstances, General Assembly resolutions or decisions by the Executive Committee.

C. DECISION ON ANNUAL PROGRAMME BUDGET
(Item 3(iv))

The Standing Committee,

(a) *Notes* the recommendations of the ACABQ as found in its Report of 1999 relating to the format of the new annual programme budget document (A/AC.96/916/ Add.2, paras. 3,4);

(b) *Notes* proposals made by UNHCR in EC/50/SC/CRP.5 concerning the new programme budget document, as well as comments by Member States;

(c) *Endorses* UNHCR's proposals in respect of the cut-off date of the new document for the year 2001;

(d) Also *endorses* UNHCR's proposals in respect of the length of the document, while observing that the document must still contain all information necessary to allow the Executive Committee to approve the Annual Programme Budget;

(e) *Requests* UNHCR to give full consideration to all the recommendations of the ACABQ with respect to streamlining the budget document, with particular emphasis on:

(i) eliminating tables and narrative on programme categories that are no longer relevant;
(ii) making the narrative more concise and focused;
(iii) eliminating information in the narrative that could be inferred from the tables;
(iv) using graphs and charts in lieu of narrative;
(v) eliminating duplication between the Annual Programme Budget and the Annual Global Appeal.

(f) Further *requests* UNHCR to:

(i) maintain, but in abbreviated form, the objectives and outputs for major country programmes in the 2001 annual programme budget document, and to make arrangements to provide detailed information on all country programmes on the UNHCR external website;
(ii) establish consistent criteria across countries for the number, type, length and quality of objectives, outputs and indicators, with a view to limiting the amount of information presented in the budget document.

(g) *Decides* to review the effectiveness of these changes prior to preparations of the annual programme budget for the year 2002.

D. CONCLUSION ON OLDER REFUGEES
(Item 4(i))

The Standing Committee,

Welcoming the increased attention given to older refugees through the United Nations International Year of Older Persons (1999);

Noting with satisfaction the various initiatives taken by UNHCR in the context of the International Year;

Welcoming in particular the formulation of a policy on older refugees, as contained in EC/50/SC/CRP.13 Annex II;

(a) *Endorses* the contents of this policy, as amended, and the integrated approach and general principles on which it is based;

(b) *Encourages* the High Commissioner to ensure its full and active implementation;

(c) *Requests* to be kept informed on a regular basis of progress achieved with respect to UNHCR's activities for the benefit of older refugees.

E. CONCLUSION ON MAINSTREAMING ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN REFUGEE OPERATIONS (Item 4(iv))

The Standing Committee,

Recognizing the activities already undertaken by UNHCR to mainstream environmental considerations into its programmes,

(a) *Notes* the usefulness of the environmental policy and guidelines developed by UNHCR;

(b) *Welcomes* UNHCR's continued efforts to promote suitable responses to environmental concerns in its refugee operations through the integration of environmental principles into its management and training tools;

(c) *Encourages* UNHCR to enhance its coordination and partnership with other relevant actors, particularly the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), notably in addressing the environmental impact of large numbers of refugees on host countries;

(d) Further *encourages* UNHCR, in coordination with relevant actors, to promote assessment and monitoring of all activities for environmental impact in refugee hosting and returnee areas.

UNHCR's
POLICY ON OLDER REFUGEES
(as endorsed at the 17th Meeting of the Standing Committee
29 February - 2 March 2000)

I. PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

1. Older refugees make up a larger proportion of the UNHCR caseload than may be generally recognized. It is commonly assumed that older people are more likely to choose to stay in their place of origin, or, more tragically still, to perish in flight or to pine away and die in exile. In fact, older refugees make up some 8.5 per cent of the overall population of concern to UNHCR, and reach up to more than 30 per cent for some caseloads. The majority of these older persons are women. The definition of an older person adopted by the World Health Organization is a person over 60 years old. However, the application of this policy will respect factors such as life expectancy and cultural norms that differ from region to region.

2. While the plight of older refugees can be severe, they should not be seen only as passive, dependent recipients of assistance. This policy seeks to highlight that older refugees often serve as formal and informal leaders of communities; they are valuable resources for guidance and advice, and transmitters of culture, skills and crafts that are important in preserving the traditions of the dispossessed and displaced. Older refugees can and do make an active contribution to the well-being of their next-of-kin, and only become totally dependent in the final stages of frailty, disability and illness. Older persons have taken the lead in return to countries as far afield as Croatia and Liberia. Older persons can also contribute to peace and reconciliation measures. Good programming requires that these roles are utilized. Alongside these positive aspects, however, are a number of needs that characterize the situation of older refugees.

II. THE CHALLENGES

3. Three major problems facing most refugees, in particular older refugees, are: social disintegration, negative social selection and chronic dependency. In the case of the older refugees these problems are often compounded.

4. Social disintegration occurs as the formal or informal social support systems erode in periods of economic decline or when war, flight, economic or security pressures cause the separation and dispersal of families. In either case, the number of elderly persons in need, and who are left to their own resources, increases. In many cases, families have had to make painful choices about abandonment in order to survive. In Eastern Europe, the comprehensive pension, health care and social welfare systems have not survived the transition to a market economy, which has led to a dramatic drop in the standard of living of all those who had to depend on welfare provided by the State, most especially the old. Elderly internally displaced and returnees have been particularly affected. Hardest hit are the victims of forced displacement who have lost not only their former entitlements but also their homes and other economic assets. A further aggravating factor has been

the erosion of traditional support networks. Economic decline, social mobility and the pace of social change have eroded community values, so that the old, in particular older refugees, may no longer enjoy the same authority, care and attention that they had in the past. In addition, the scourges of HIV/AIDS and war have often wiped out an entire middle generation, thereby contributing further to the disintegration of the social fabric; invariably, it is the older refugee who is called upon to assume more immediate responsibility towards the younger members of the family.

5. Negative social selection occurs when refugee camps and collective centres empty over time, with those who are young, healthy and able-bodied the first to depart, leaving behind the weaker and more vulnerable members of the group, namely the sick, the handicapped, single mothers with young children and the elderly. When resources are limited, these groups are particularly vulnerable. The plight of the elderly is particularly tragic. Often they have nowhere to go and no one to take care of them. In this way, some collective centres in Central and Eastern Europe have become geriatric wards in all but name.

6. This residual caseload of solitary older persons, unable to secure State benefits or family support, may become dependent on UNHCR for long periods of time. Here UNHCR faces a particular challenge. It must work to ensure that their experience of exile is not compounded by poverty and destitution, while seeking to avoid chronic dependency by helping them regularize their status and obtain access to all possible benefits, entitlements and rights. This is not an easy task where dramatic social and economic change in asylum countries has caused a marked decline in the living standards of all residents.

7. A comprehensive policy on elderly refugees must take into account both these needs and the contribution they are able to make, commensurate with their age and status.

III. AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

8. UNHCR's management of refugee protection and assistance programmes requires that its staff and those of implementing partners recognize the different needs and potential of all refugees, be they young or old. Their needs are not well served when, particularly in emergencies, refugees are treated as an undifferentiated mass of humanity. To ensure that UNHCR's programmes become more sensitive to the needs and potential contribution of older refugees, a specific policy on older refugees is needed.

9. Older people's needs must not, however, be addressed in isolation. They are met normally and most effectively within the context of family and community of which they are a part. Consequently, UNHCR needs to strengthen the capacity of families and communities to meet their own needs and incorporate older people within them. Thus this policy should be seen as linked to the High Commissioner's Policy on Refugee Women and the Policy on Refugee Children. Efforts to mainstream the policy priorities relating to refugee women, children and adolescents, need to be extended to the elderly.

10 Older people of concern need to be integrated within UNHCR's overall protection and assistance programming process. Although often at a disadvantage through reduced physical capability, older persons are a valuable resource with much to offer. The potential contributions of older persons must not be overlooked. They are people with a wealth of accumulated experience and knowledge, well able to participate in decisions and activities that affect their own lives and those of their families and communities. Efforts on behalf of older refugees that see them only as vulnerable individuals to be fed and sheltered are not sufficient; they must be treated as contributing members of their communities.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL GOAL

11. UNHCR's primary goal in relation to older refugees is that:

> Older male and female refugees, and other older persons of concern to the Office, live their latter years in dignity and security, contributing actively to their families and communities for as long as it remains possible for them to do so, and are offered care and support if they become physically or mentally frail.

V. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

12. In formulating this Policy, UNHCR re-affirms its support for the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, based on the International Plan of Action on Ageing[1].

VI. OBJECTIVES

13. On the basis of these Principles, UNHCR staff, and those of its implementing partners, should endeavour to address the protection and assistance needs of older persons of concern to UNHCR in a gender-sensitive manner and ensure their equality of access to all measures that will promote their participation and well-being. To this end, UNHCR staff will pursue the following specific objectives:

(i) Early identification of, and care for, older persons with special needs in an emergency;

(ii) The protection of older persons at risk from neglect and abandonment;

(iii) The regularization of the status of older persons so that they can receive benefits to which they are entitled;

(iv) The consistent incorporation, from the beginning of a refugee situation, of gender and age-sensitive protection and assistance criteria that will thus be useful for assessing, monitoring and addressing the needs and vulnerabilities of older persons;

(v) The improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of protection and assistance programmes by ensuring that adequate attention is given to the needs and resources of all members of the population in a way that takes into account specific needs deriving from gender;

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[1] General Assembly resolution 46/91, 16 December 1991.

(vi) The improvement of data collection and needs assessment in order to have a more accurate picture of the refugee population and hence more effective targeting of programmes for specific age and social groups;

(vii) In all phases of programme planning and implementation, the role and potential contribution of older refugees should be borne in mind; in this way, they will have the means and opportunities, wherever possible, to continue to realize their potential; such an approach would also promote better community care initiatives for the very old;

(viii) A strengthened community services input in UNHCR programmes to ensure effective outreach to all refugees, and a holistic approach which sees older refugees as part of family and community;

(ix) Responsible phasing-out of UNHCR care for older persons of concern, through the establishment of programmes by local NGOs, relevant Government Ministries (not solely the Ministry responsible for refugee affairs) or in conjunction with international development agencies. Such phasing out must include a component of capacity-building of national and local structures, where necessary;

(x) The training of UNHCR and implementing partner staff based on more in-depth study of the different needs related to the gender of the elderly population, so as to understand and address appropriately, within their areas of competence, the specific needs of older persons;

(xi) The promotion of awareness of, and response to, the particular needs of older refugees through information strategies directed at the Governments of both countries of asylum and countries of origin, donors, NGOs, other United Nations bodies and the public at large.

VII. CONCLUSION

14. Older refugees will always have special needs, but the High Commissioner does not call for addressing the needs of older refugees separate from those of other refugees. Indeed UNHCR's Policy on Older Refugees has been formulated with the hope that future efforts on behalf of older persons will have become so well integrated into all aspects of protection and programme planning and implementation that a separate Policy on Older Refugees will cease, in time, to be necessary. Commitment to, and due regard for, the components of a policy aimed at older refugees are pre-requisites for ensuring their participation and well-being. Much of what remains to be done for older refugees, therefore, can be accomplished with the resources normally provided by host governments and the international community.